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Pressure is mounting on Waukegan to reach an agreement on the cleanup of its polluted harbor, a project that would likely cost the city at least \$6 million.

In recent weeks, U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk (R-Ill.) and his staff have called meetings with Mayor Richard Hyde and the city's environmental attorney, Jeff Jeep, to urge the city to join a \$21 million cleanup effort.

"Bottom line for Waukegan is, without a casino and without a cleaned-up harbor, Waukegan doesn't have an economic future," Kirk said this week. Waukegan tried to land the state's last casino license, but the Illinois Gaming Board awarded it to Rosemont last month.

Kirk has said he can arrange for the city to receive about \$15 million in federal grants to clean up Waukegan Harbor, a move that is seen by many as essential to realizing the city's dream of turning its industrial lakefront into a recreational playground.

"I would be shocked and stunned if Waukegan turned down \$15 million in environmental cleanup money," Kirk said. "I would be seriously concerned about leadership that chose to walk away from that much money."

Hyde said he expects the City Council to decide April 19 how to proceed.

"We are still studying the project. It's no big secret," Hyde said.

Aldermen discussed the issue during a closed-door meeting Monday night. Hyde declined to elaborate Tuesday.

Other parties involved in the negotiations say the city has raised the most objections to the deal.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency have signed on to manage and complete the project, during which the harbor would be dredged for PCB-polluted sediment. The material would be dumped in the local Yeoman Creek landfill, a Superfund cleanup site because of heavy metals that were dumped there.

Waukegan officials have said they are concerned about the city's share of the project's cost--between \$6 million and \$7 million. They also have expressed concern about the Army Corps' plan to deeply dredge the harbor as part of the cleanup, which some council members say would encourage industrial shipping in their proposed recreational harbor.

After more than 16 months, negotiations between the city and the corps, the EPA and the companies and organizations legally responsible for the landfill have turned contentious.

"What is so difficult to understand about the city's position?" Jeep wrote in a March 12 e-mail message to 11 parties in the negotiations. "The city will not pay millions of dollars toward the local share--whether the amount is \$2.8 million or \$6.8 million. ... There is no realistic chance that the \$6.8 million will materialize in the next few weeks."

Jeep said Monday that he could not comment on the negotiations.

On March 16 Kirk called Hyde into his office for a meeting with representatives from the EPA and the corps. Earlier this month, Kirk's staff met with Jeep. Both meetings were meant to coax the city into a deal, Kirk said.

"I think there are some concerns from some lawyers that if somebody wants an arrangement with no costs, and absolutely no single question mark, then you will do nothing, and then Waukegan will lose," Kirk said. "If you sat a group of lawyers in a room and began to think of all the things that can go wrong, and especially if you pay them \$500 an hour, you will get a very long list."

In the 1970s the EPA discovered polychlorinated biphenyls, or PCBs, in Waukegan Harbor at dangerously high levels. PCBs are known to cause tumors, reproductive failure and liver disorders.

Environmental officials said Outboard Marine Corp. dumped hydraulic fluid into the water for more than 20 years. In the 1990s the EPA launched a massive cleanup and spent more than \$20 million to remove tons of PCB-soaked material from the harbor.

In 1993 Waukegan Harbor was declared mostly clean, but PCB contamination remained at the harbor bottom.

Kirk said Monday that a deal has to be reached by October or he will find somewhere else to spend the \$15 million in grants